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Countdown to 2017

By Paul Posner

Don Kettl

Election campaigns are a time of promises. Transitions are a time of frantic preparation. And then, perhaps too soon, it is time to govern. Governing – as we know – is the hard work of turning promises into legislation, budgets, actions, and results.

Large portions of the electorate say they are frustrated or disillusioned by what they see as the failure of governing institutions to deliver. Elected leaders themselves have come to share this frustration. Indeed, while Presidents have left positive legacies, recent Administrations of both parties have experienced disheartening failures and shortfalls of execution ranging from disaster response during Hurricane Katrina to the crash of the web site for health care reform.

To help an incoming Administration and Congress, the National Academy of Public Administration and the American Society of Public Administration teamed up with George Mason University's Schar School of Policy and Government to commission a series of memos highlighting the best advice from leading academic and practitioners in public administration. Twenty five memos were published several weeks ago and can be found at

napat16.org/images/NAPA ASPATransitions Memos Booklet 11.15.16.pdf

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The memos address the following five broad areas of policy and management:

- Managing Government to Achieve National Objectives What strategies should the President adopt to improve the central leadership of government programs and agencies
- Strengthening Policy Leadership and Follow Through What are the most promising decision-making procedures and implementation approaches the next Administration can use to effectively shape and follow through on its main policy commitments?
- Managing Across Boundaries to Achieve National Goals How can the new Administration develop new, effective strategies for policy and administrative collaboration across boundaries between federal agencies, across levels of government, between government and the private and nonprofit sectors, and across global boundaries?
- Sharpening the Tools of Government Action How can government outcomes be achieved effectively when government relies on independent actors through financial, regulatory and contractual vehicles?
- Increasing Government's Capacity to Manage Complex Policy Issues What are the unique policy design and management challenges that are characteristic of some of the most important policy issues of our time?

The Memos collectively depict the clash between growing expectations for government actions and institutional realities and constraints. While government has come under pressure to meet ever higher expectations, it has become increasingly difficult to deliver on those promises. Part of this stems from the growing complexity

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of government's role. A government that once was focused on delivering the mail and collecting taxes is now challenged to rebuild the nation's financial system, ensure safe drinking water and improve education for all students across a diverse nation.

With increasing polarization of views among leaders and the public alike, consensus about the role of government itself has eroded. How can government agencies navigate when Congress and the White House, interest groups and clients are riven by conflicts over priorities and goals for such policies as those for climate change, education reform or even tax administration? Moreover, agencies face a more blame-seeking environment, as divided constituencies deploy weaponized social media to mobilize followers and dramatize differences. Such pressures may discourage the risk taking and innovation many feel are necessary for government to improve performance.

As government's role grows, so does our reliance on nonfederal actors to implement national goals. For the most part, we are in the habit of uploading promises and downloading responsibility to a plethora of states, localities, nonprofits, private businesses and citizens. While such changes in the way government delivers can enhance our collective capacity to achieve national objectives, they also complicate accountability. Delegating the task of governing to others does not relieve federal agencies or Presidents of responsibility or blame.

In this environment, deep-seated policy implementation and management challenges require a long-term strategy to instill the urgency and institute the reforms needed to achieve more ambitious and complex goals. While the media and public

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often view management problems as being caused by short-term leadership or situational factors, in fact the failures of government programs typically stem from chronic and perennial shortfalls in management capacity, misaligned incentives, poor use of technology, and weak cross-sectoral collaboration – coupled with overly hyped goals and expectations.

Often these implementation challenges come to our attention in a crisis, a symptom of the collective failure give priority to these important, but not urgent, management issues. Because these problems can deal a crippling blow to an Administration, it is critical that management and implementation challenges be addressed during and following transitions preemptively before they break to the surface in a crisis.

In the next several weeks, ten of the Memos will be presented in Gov Exec in what we call Countdown to 2017. The clock is ticking toward inauguration and it is important that a new team in the Administration and Congress learn about the major challenges they will face, as well as the potential solutions recommended by leading experts in policy and management. The following memos will be presented:

- James Pfiffner, George Mason University Staffing the President's team.

 Recommends ways to streamline and expedite the appointments process to satisfy competing needs of White House, agencies and Congress
- John Salamone, CFO, House of Representatives Workforce Management: Human Resource Management and Public Service Motivation provides

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an agenda for enhancing human capital planning across government, with a focus on improving the talent pipeline and employee engagement

- Steve Redburn and Paul Posner, George Mason University Reforming the Federal Budget Process. Proposes approaches to reinvent the budget process to strengthen discipline, improve certainty and heighten focus on long term fiscal outcomes
- Shelley Metzenbaum and Robert Shea, former leaders of governmentwide performance under Presidents Obama and Bush Performance Accountability, Evidence and Improvement. Looks back at initiatives from recent Administrations to promote reforms to better integrate performance data into the decision making process within federal agencies and the Congress
- Don Kettl, University of Maryland Collaboration Across Boundaries. Brings together what we have learned about how to promote greater collaboration across agencies, levels of government and sectors.
- Barry Vanlare, former National Governors Association and Timothy Conlan, George Mason University Strengthening Partnerships with State and local governments. Develops an agenda for generating closer relationships across levels of government in setting objectives and carrying out federal programs on the ground
- John Donahue, Kennedy School Improving the Role of Public-Private Partnerships, Reviews the experiences with public-private partnerships and harvests

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lessons learned about managing these initiatives to balance benefits and potential risks.

- Steve Kelman, Kennedy School Procurement: Focusing on Performance and Results, Provides an agenda to improve accountability for performance under contracts, entailing greater use of pay-for-success models, more transparent information on pricing and more emphasis on post-award monitoring and assessment.
- Neil Kerwin, American University- Federal Regulations: An Agenda to Improve Administrative Rule Making, Assesses approaches to improving central oversight of proposed federal regulations, priority setting and planning, public input and engagement, and information and analysis
- Mark Pisano, University of Southern California and John Bartle,
 University of Nebraska Infrastructure: Building a new Paradigm for Finance and
 Governance. Recommends new approaches to engage private business and
 beneficiaries in co-financing infrastructure, while building more collaborative
 partnerships with states and localities
